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If you love animals and you are allergic to them, caring for pets can seem like walking an endless tightrope. See which 10 pets could be the best for allergy sufferers.

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"My dog's ears have a terrible odor. What could it be?" "My puppy has been scratching his ears. The ears have dark, crumbly material in them. What should I do?" "My dog has been rubbing his ears on the carpet, but I do not see anything wrong. Why is he doing this?" These are some of the most commonly asked questions of veterinarians.

#### 4. DOGS WITH SENSITIVE SKIN – Looking Beneath the Fur

As any owner knows, one of life's simple pleasures is petting your favorite dog. Running a hand over a soft coat of thick, shiny fur feels good to you and your dog. Unfortunately, if your dog has poor skin health, that simple pleasure might not be so pleasant.

## ALLERGIES IN DOGS – Symptoms & Triggers

Just like people, dogs can show allergic symptoms at any age when their immune systems begin to recognize certain everyday substances – or allergens – as dangerous. Even though these allergens are common in most environments and harmless to most animals, a dog with allergies will have an extreme reaction to them. Allergens can be problematic when inhaled, ingested or contact a dog's skin. As the dog's body tries to rid itself of these substances, a variety of skin, digestive and respiratory symptoms may appear.

### What Are the General Symptoms of Allergies in Dogs?

- Itchy, red, moist or scabbed skin
- Increased scratching
- Itchy, runny eyes
- Itchy back or base of tail (most commonly flea allergy)
- Itchy ears and ear infections
- Sneezing
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Snoring caused by an inflamed throat
- Paw chewing/swollen paws
- Constant licking

Allergic dogs may also suffer from secondary bacterial or yeast skin infections, which may cause hair loss, scabs or crusts on the skin.

### Which Dogs Are At Risk for Getting Allergies?

Any dog can develop allergies at any time during his life, but allergic reactions seem to be especially common in Terriers, Setters, Retrievers, and flat-faced breeds such as Pugs, Bulldogs and Boston terriers.

### Some common allergens include:

- Tree, grass and weed pollens
- Mold spores
- Dust and house dust mites
- Dander
- Feathers
- Cigarette smoke
- Food ingredients (e.g. beef, chicken, pork, corn, wheat or soy)
- Prescription drugs
- Fleas and flea-control products (Only a few flea bites can trigger intense itchiness for two to three weeks!)
- Perfumes
- Cleaning products
- Fabrics
- Insecticidal shampoo
- Rubber and plastic materials

### Can Dogs Be Allergic to Food?

Yes, but it often takes some detective work to find out what substance is causing the allergic reaction. Dogs with a food allergy will commonly have itchy skin, chronic ear infections or sometimes gastrointestinal problems like diarrhea and vomiting, and an elimination diet will most probably be used to determine the cause. If your dog is specifically allergic to chicken, for example, you should avoid feeding him any products containing chicken protein or fat.

### What Should I Do If I Think My Dog Has Allergies?

Visit your veterinarian. After taking a complete history and conducting a physical examination, he or she may be able to determine the source of your dog's allergic reaction. If not, your vet will most probably recommend skin or blood tests, or a special elimination diet, to find out what's causing the allergic reaction.



## How Are Dog Allergies Diagnosed?

If your dog's itchy, red or irritated skin persists beyond initial treatment by a veterinarian, allergy testing, most often performed by a veterinary dermatologist, is likely warranted. The diagnostic test of choice is an intradermal skin test similar to the one performed on humans.

The only way to diagnose a food allergy is to feed your dog a prescription hydrolyzed protein diet or a novel protein and carbohydrate diet exclusively for 12 weeks. The importance of not feeding your dog anything but the diet cannot be emphasised enough - that means no treats, table food or flavored medication. This diet will be free of potential allergy-causing ingredients and will ideally have ingredients your dog has never been exposed to. Your dog will remain on the diet until its symptoms go away, at which time you'll begin to reintroduce old foods to see which ones might be causing the allergic reaction.

Please note, many dogs diagnosed with a food allergy will require home-cooked meals, but this must be done in conjunction with your veterinarian, as it requires careful food balancing.

## How Can Dog Allergies Be Treated?

The best way to treat allergies is to remove the offending allergens from the environment. Prevention is the best treatment for allergies caused by fleas. Start a flea control program for all of your pets before the season starts. Remember, outdoor pets can carry fleas inside to indoor pets. See your veterinarian for advice about the best flea control products for your dog and the environment.

If dust is the problem, clean your pet's bedding once a week and vacuum at least twice weekly - this includes rugs, curtains and any other materials that gather dust.

Weekly bathing may help relieve itching and remove environmental allergens and pollens from your dog's skin. Discuss with your vet what prescription shampoos are best, as frequent bathing with the wrong product can dry out skin.

If you suspect your dog has a food allergy, your pet will need to be put on a prescription hydrolyzed protein diet or novel protein diet. Once the allergy is determined, your vet will recommend specific foods or a home-cooked diet.

## Are There Allergy Medications for Dogs?

Since certain substances cannot be removed from the environment, your vet may recommend medications to control the allergic reaction:

In the case of airborne allergens, your dog may benefit from allergy injections. These will help your pet develop resistance to the offending agent, instead of just masking the itch. Antihistamines such as Cetirizine can be used, but may only benefit a small percentage of dogs with allergies. Ask your vet first.

Fatty acid supplements might help relieve your dog's itchy skin. There are also shampoos that may help prevent skin infection, which occurs commonly in dogs with allergies. Sprays containing oatmeal, aloe and other natural products. There are several flea-prevention products that can be applied monthly to your dog's skin.

If the problem is severe, you may have to resort to cortisone to control the allergy. However these drugs are strong and should be used with caution and only under the guidance of your veterinarian. There are also new products available on the market, so please consult your veterinarian.

## Are Allergies and Bronchitis Related?

Chronic exposure to inhaled irritants (including cigarette smoke) may be a cause of bronchitis in the dog. Bronchitis is characterized by a persistent cough due to inflammation of the airway and excessive mucus production. Treatment may include medication to open breathing passages, antibiotics and anti-inflammatory agents. Please remember, your pets should not be exposed to cigarette smoke.

*Source: <http://pets.webmd.com/dogs/allergies-dogs>*

## WHEN FLUFFY FORCES YOU TO FLEE – 10 of the best pets for allergy sufferers

If you love animals and you are allergic to them, caring for pets can seem like walking an endless tightrope. Given the bottles of allergy medication lining your medicine cabinets, you feel as if you've half-earned a medical degree in dosages, side effects, and pet dander. "Just one pet and then I'll wash my hands" is a phrase common in the mind of an animal allergy sufferer. Then there is the frustration level when dealing with over-eager pet owners who don't understand your allergies. But not to worry — we have a list of some animals that are a little friendlier to your allergies.

Despite many claims otherwise, veterinarians urge that there are no completely hypoallergenic pets. While no dogs are allergy-free, some experts refer to hypoallergenic dogs as breeds that produce less allergens than some others. In fact, there are some breeds that may incite a lesser reaction in allergy sufferers — and here are 10 of them! (If you are allergic to animals, be sure to consult a medical professional before procuring a pet that may induce an allergy attack.)

### Portuguese water dog

A common misconception about pet allergies is that people are allergic to fur. But as the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America points out, "People with pet allergies have supersensitive immune systems that react to harmless proteins in the pet's dander (dead skin that is shed), saliva or urine. These proteins are called allergens." Further, these allergens can remain potent for several months. They seem to be sticky and can travel distances on people's clothing. However, some animals are better tolerated because of their fur. Some dogs either do not shed a lot, or they require so much grooming that their dander is washed away more frequently. This is the case with the Portuguese water dog, an active breed with a robust coat requiring regular maintenance. White House dog Bo Obama is a Portuguese water dog, chosen to accommodate Malia Obama's allergies.

### Sphynx cat

Most cat allergies are a result of the Fel d 1 glycoprotein, which is present in cat saliva and skin excretions. So the runny eyes, watery noses, and scratchy throats endured by most allergy sufferers are virtually unavoidable if they are exposed to cats. While not hypoallergenic, the Sphynx is recommended by some breeders as better for allergy sufferers, simply because they don't deposit allergen-laden hair.

### Kerry blue terrier

The Kerry blue terrier is considered a low-allergy dog because it sheds less dander than some other breeds.

### Standard poodle

The Standard poodle has a long hair-growth cycle, which typically means it will shed less. Experts tend to recommend this dog to allergy sufferers because "these coats tend to be both tightly curled, and usually lacking in undercoat. This combination tends to keep dead hair from detaching and floating in the air, and it tends to retain the dander, which is the most common source of allergens.

### Devon rex cat

The Devon rex has a short, rippling coat made of down fur. As some experts point out, "the Devon rex is also a good potential choice for people who are allergic to cats. While no cat can be truly hypoallergenic, many people with allergies to cats discover they can live comfortably with a Devon rex."

### Bichon frise

The Bichon frise is a lower-allergen dog in the same way as poodles. Because they have a curled coat, it is harder for their dander to escape.

### American Labradoodle

The American labradoodle, a cross between a Labrador retriever and a poodle, is a popular low-allergen dog. It is different from the Australian labradoodle, which is being bred with the goal of creating a purebred Australian labradoodle.

### Leopard gecko

Lizards make excellent pets for people with allergies simply because they are hairless and relatively low maintenance. It is extremely uncommon for a person to be allergic to lizards.

### Goldfish

Ultimately, perhaps the only hypoallergenic pet that experts can agree on would be a fish. Yes, a fish surrounded in a watery enclosure will certainly be as allergen-free as can be.

**Source:** <http://www.mnn.com/health/allergies/photos/10-of-the-best-pets-for-allergy-sufferers/when-fluffy-forces-you-to-flee>

## DOG EAR PROBLEMS

Ear problems are one of the top routine reasons why dogs visit the veterinarian. "My dog's ears have a terrible odor. What could it be?" "My puppy has been scratching his ears. The ears have dark, crumbly material in them. What should I do?" "My dog has been rubbing his ears on the carpet, but I do not see anything wrong. Why is he doing this?" These are some of the most commonly asked questions of veterinarians.

### Signs of ear disease

Every day we see dogs who have problems with their ears. Signs of these ear problems include:

- Odor
- Scratching or rubbing of ears and head
- Discharge in the ears
- Redness or swelling of the ear flap or canal
- Shaking of the head or tilting it to one side
- Pain around the ears
- Changes in behavior such as depression or irritability

Ear disease is one of the most common conditions we see in pets. The medical name for inflammation of the outer ear canal is 'otitis externa.' It is estimated that up to 20% of the dog population is affected by this disease.

### Causes of ear disease

Dogs can have ear problems for many different reasons. When we see a dog with ear disease we need to think about the possibility of:

- Allergies such as atopy or food allergies
- Parasites - ear mites
- Infections - bacteria and yeast
- Foreign bodies, e.g., plant awns
- Trauma

- Hormonal abnormalities, e.g., hypothyroidism
- The ear environment, e.g., excess moisture and ear anatomy
- Hereditary or immune conditions, and tumors

**Allergies:** Dogs with allergies, either to food or something they either inhale or that contacts their skin, often have ear problems. As a matter of fact, the ear problem may be the first sign of the allergy. Since the allergy changes the environment within the ear, we sometimes see secondary infections with bacteria or yeast. If we just treat the ear infection, we are not getting to the root of the problem. We need to treat the allergies too.

**Parasites:** The ear mite, *Otodectes cynotis*, is a common cause of ear problems in cats, but less common in dogs. Some dogs are hypersensitive to the mites, however, and the resultant itching can be intense. These dogs may scratch so much they severely traumatize the ear.

**Ear Infections:** Numerous types of bacteria and the yeast, *Malassezia pachydermatis*, cause ear infections. The normal, healthy ear has a good defense against these organisms, but if the ear environment changes due to allergies, hormone abnormalities, or moisture, the bacteria and yeast can greatly multiply and break down these defenses.

**Foreign Bodies:** Plant awns, those little "stick-tights" that cling to our clothes and our dogs' fur, can sometimes enter the ear canal. Their presence causes irritation, the dog scratches, and before you know it we have a traumatised, infected ear. So when you groom your dog after a walk in the bush, be sure to check the ears, too.

**Trauma:** As we described above, self-inflicted trauma to the ear due to scratching can exacerbate ear problems.

**Hormonal Abnormalities:** Deficiencies or excesses of various hormones can result in skin and ear problems. Thyroid hormone, glucocorticoids produced by the adrenal gland, and sex hormones all influence the health of the skin and ears.

**Ear Environment:** Bacteria and yeast could not ask for a better environment to live in than a warm, dark, moist ear canal. Dogs with heavy, floppy ears such as Cocker Spaniels may have ear problems due to the excess moisture that builds up in their ears.

**Other Causes:** There are various rare hereditary diseases that occur in different breeds or lines and affect the ears. These include dermatomyositis in Collies and Shetland Sheepdogs, and primary seborrhea in Shar Peis and West Highland White Terriers. Squamous cell carcinomas, melanomas, and other tumors can be seen in the ears.



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## Diagnosis

Because there are many potential causes of ear problems, we cannot just say it is a bacterial ear infection, dispense antibiotics, and it will go away. Often, more work is needed. Your veterinarian can use an otoscope to look down into the ear canal and determine the amount of inflammation present, if the tympanic membrane (ear drum) is involved, and if there are any foreign bodies, tumors, or other potential causes of the problem. Swabs of the ear can be taken, smeared on a microscope slide, stained, and examined for bacteria, yeast, and mites. A thorough history and physical exam may help determine if this could be a hormonal, allergic, or hereditary problem. If these are suspected, further diagnostic testing would be needed. If a bacterial infection does not respond to the first antibiotic therapy, a culture and sensitivity may need to be performed to select a different antibiotic.

## Treatment

The treatment is going to depend on what caused the ear problem and what secondary conditions are there as a result. Antibiotics are used for bacterial infections and antifungals for yeast infections. Glucocorticoids such as dexamethasone are often included in these preparations to reduce the amount of inflammation in the ear. Ear problems caused by a systemic disease such as a hormone abnormality or allergy must include a therapy that treats the whole dog, such as hormonal replacement or allergy testing and hyposensitisation (immunotherapy).

Regardless of the cause of the ear disease, we must always keep the ear canal clean.

## Cleaning ears

Your dog's ear is more L-shaped than yours, and debris loves to collect at the corner of the L. To remove this debris, apply an ear cleaner into your dog's ear canal. Ear cleaners should be slightly acidic but should NOT sting. Massage the base of the ear for 20-30 seconds to soften and release the debris. Wipe out the loose debris and excess fluid with a cotton ball. Repeat this procedure until you see no more debris. Let your dog shake his head to remove any excess fluid. When you are through, wipe the dog's ear flap and area below the ear gently with a towel. Depending on your dog's ear condition, you may have to start out cleaning the ears twice a day. Always follow your veterinarian's recommendations.

Cotton applicator swabs can be used to clean the inside of the earflap and the part of the ear canal you can see. They should NOT be used farther down in the ear canal since that tends to pack debris in the ear canal, rather than help to remove it.

Some ear problems are so painful, the dog must be anesthetized to do a good job of cleaning the ears. You may find your dog does not like to have his ears cleaned because it is uncomfortable. Talking to him during the process, stopping momentarily to give him a treat if he is doing well (we do not want to reward fussiness!) and doing something fun afterwards may all help.

After the ear is clean, allow some time for the ears to dry. Then you can apply any ear medication that was prescribed.

## Preventing ear disease

The key to healthy ears is to keep them clean. Check your dog's ears weekly. A slight amount of waxy buildup may be present in normal ears. If your dog swims a lot, has pendulous ears, or a history of ear disease, routine cleaning (often once to three times per week) is recommended. Use the same procedure as described above. Excess hair around the ear can be clipped to allow more air flow. Follow your veterinarian's recommendation on how to treat any underlying condition that predisposes your dog to ear problems.

Remember, if your dog is showing severe discomfort, the ears have a bad smell, or the ear canals look very abnormal, do not delay in contacting your veterinarian. If your dog has a ruptured or weakened eardrum, some ear cleansers and medications could do more harm than good.

**Sources:** <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=2+2095&aid=273>

## DOGS WITH SENSITIVE SKIN: LOOKING BENEATH THE FUR

As any owner knows, one of life's simple pleasures is petting your favorite dog. Running a hand over a soft coat of thick, shiny fur feels good to you and your dog. Unfortunately, if your dog has poor skin health, that simple pleasure might not be so pleasant. What can you do?

**Check for pests.** Examine your dog's coat and skin thoroughly for the presence of ticks, fleas, lice or other parasites. If you spot any, ask your vet for advice and follow the appropriate treatment.

**Consider allergies.** If your dog is pest-free and otherwise healthy, his discomfort may be caused by an allergic reaction to something in its environment, such as pollen, dust or mold. Allergic dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin that results in licking, scratching, loss of fur and dry, flaky skin. To learn more about allergic dermatitis, read this article from the experts at Hill's.



**Talk to your vet.** Skin conditions can have a wide range of causes - from parasites to allergies, from hormonal imbalances to bacterial infections, stress and more. Be sure to consult with your veterinarian about your dog's individual health and treatment options.

**Feed your dog well.** Even if the cause of their skin condition is not dietary, many dogs can be helped with a high quality food formulated especially for skin sensitivity. Look for one containing high quality protein, essential fatty acids and antioxidants - all are important nutrients that can help protect your dog's skin.

**Source:** <http://www.hillspet.com.au/en-auldog-care/dogs-with-sensitive-skin-looking-beneath-the-fur-mature-adult-dog.html>

### Signs of a problem:

- Dry, flaky skin
- Excessive scratching, licking or rubbing
- Excessive shedding
- Hair loss, bald patches



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